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ABSTRACT

This paper identifies eminent persons in the field of sociology using three measures: 1) the number of sociologists who identify a peer as eminent (reputation score); 2) the mean ranking these individuals receive from peers (frequency score); and 3) the number of citations made in the literature to the work of such individuals (citation score). In 1977, questionnaires were mailed to a sample of 300 sociologists randomly selected from the membership of the American Sociological Association. Respondents were provided an alphabetical list of names found by Swatos and Swatos (1974) to have been the most frequently cited in introductory sociology texts. They were asked to rank the ten most significant sociologists. Names could be added to the list. The return rate was 61%. The number of citations to an individual's work was calculated using the 1976 volume of the "Social Sciences Citation Index." The results of all data indicated that while reputation and frequency were highly associated, citation was not closely associated with either. The author concluded that the frequency with which a sociologist's work is cited in the current journal literature provides an index of eminence that is quantitative, objective, and readily available. (Author/RM)

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Eminence in Sociology: Three Measures

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In attempting to identify eminence in sociology, some writers have used subjective rankings (Cartter, 1966; Roose and Anderson, 1970). However, just as reputational studies of community power confounded the reputation for power with power itself, these studies confounded reputation with actual contributions to the discipline.

Such difficulties have led others to develop measures of productivity based upon publication counts of sociologists (Lewis, 1968; Knudsen and Vaughan, 1969; Glenn and Villemez, 1970; Glenn, 1971; Sturgis and Clemente, 1973). However, the use of weights in calculating publication indices incorporates subjectivity into an ostensibly objective measure. Furthermore, publication is not equivalent to importance or impact upon others.

These difficulties have in turn led to the use of citations as a measure of significance (Broadus, 1967; Oromaner, 1968; Cole and Cole, 1968, 1973; Lightfield, 1971; Roche and Smith, n.d.). It has been argued (Roche and Smith, n.d.: 6) that "use of the citation is clearly closer to 'important contribution to knowledge' than mere publication. The citation signifies recognition and bestows prestige. It symbolizes influence and continuity."

The purpose of the present study is to examine the relationships between three measures of eminence. One is the number of sociologists who identify a peer as eminent, another is the mean ranking these individuals receive from peers, while the third is the number of citations made in the literature to the work of such individuals.

Method

In 1977 an anonymous questionnaire was mailed to a sample of 300 sociologists living in the U.S. who were randomly selected from the membership directory of the American Sociological Association. They were asked to rank those individuals they considered to be the ten most significant sociologists (i.e., "those who have made the most important contributions to sociological knowledge.") Respondants were provided an alphabetical list of those names found by Swatos and Swatos (1974) to have been the most frequently cited in introductory sociology texts, but were invited to add names not on the list.

Resulting data were used to calculate (1) a reputation score representing the mean rank each individual received, (2) a frequency score representing the number of respondents who placed the individual among the ten most significant sociologists, and (3) a citation score consisting of the total number of citations to an individual's work appearing in the 1976 volume of the Social Sciences Citation Index.

Results

One hundred eighty-three complete and usable returns were obtained, yielding a return rate of 61%. Summarized

below are the results.

RESULTS OF THREE MEASURES OF EMINENCE

	REPUTATION		FREQUENCY		CITATION	
NAME	SCORE	RANK	N	RANK	CITATIONS	RANK
Weber	2.610	(1)	167	(1)	522	(3)
Durkheim	3.116	(2)	146	(2)	373	(9)
Marx	3.185	(3)	135	(3)	1,315	(1)
Cooley	5.359	(4)	89	(7)	47	(17)
Merton	5.575	(5)	132	(4)	434	(5)
Parsons	5.642	(6)	126	(5)	748	(2)
Sumner	5.659	(7)	47	(9)	25	(19)
Sorokin	5.729	(8)	85	(8)	93	(15)
Mills	6.480	(9)	100	(6)	159	(10)
Turner	6.900	(10)	10	(20)	144	(11)
Murdock	6.937	(11)	16	(19)	2	(20)
Coleman	7.147	(12)	34	(14.5)	517	(4)
Davis	7.352	(13)	34	(14.5)	408	(6)
Nisbet	7.483	(14)	31	(16)	99	(14)
Warner	7.578	(15)	38	(12)	86	(16)
Linton	7.600	(16)	35	(13)	42	(18)
Blau	7.666	(17)	45	(11)	405	(7)
Bendix	7.758	(18)	29	(17)	140	(12)
Lipset	7.891	(19)	46	(10)	380	(8)
Lenski	8.125	(20)	24	(18)	126	(13)

The rank correlation coefficient between reputation and frequency was .74, between reputation and citation it was

.30, and between frequency and citation it was .47. Thus, while reputation and frequency were highly associated, citation was not closely associated with either.

Conclusion

The frequency with which a sociologist's work is cited in the current journal literature provides an index of eminence that is quantitative, objective, and readily available. The validity of this approach has been demonstrated elsewhere (Myers, 1970; Cole and Cole, 1973).

Research in sociology has become highly specialized. It has been pointed out (Myers, 1970: 1,041) that "What may seem vitally important to one specialist may seem trivial to another specialist, if he is working in quite a different area." This lack of agreement is usually evident in a department attempting to fill a position, and efforts are frequently made to overcome the difficulty by consulting a larger sample of experts. However, this tends to be a difficult and time consuming process.

Given the validity and other advantages of a citation measure of eminence and its relatively low correlations with subjective measures, it is suggested that the former be more widely used when such a measure is desired.

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